(b) The discussions contributed to an enhanced understanding on bilateral issues as well as on developments in India's neighbourhood, non-proliferation and disarmament, international terrorism, the forthcoming meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group and the India-EU Summit. Both sides reiterated their commitment to strengthening bilateral trade and commerce to achieve a target of 5 billion over the next two years. It was agreed to initiate in the year 2001, a formal, structured bilateral dialogue between senior officials on issues pertaining to non-proliferation and disarmanent. Mr. Cook publicly stated that the U.K. sees India 'as a natural contender for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council'. During the visit, India and the U.K. inaugurated the high-level, non-govemmental India-UK. Round Table, which has been constituted recently to advise the Governments of India and the U.K. on ways of enhancing and enriching the bilateral relationship.

(c) and (d) India and the U.K. have been cooperating both bilaterally and in multilateral fora to address the problem of cross-border terrorism and funding of terrorist activities through the India-U.K. Extradition Treaty and the Agreement for Investigation and Prosecution of Crime, Tracing, Restraint and Confiscation of Proceeds and Instruments of Crime and Terrorist Funds, the ongoing cooperation would be further strengthened under the provisions of the Terrorism Bill, which is being discussed by the British Parliament. On defence relations India and the U.K. have been working towards strengthening the defence ties through the India-U.K. Defence Consulative Group, which was established in March 1995. The Group facilitates a mutual understanding of each other's strategic and security interests, and cooperation through exchange of visits and linkages between defence industries and training institutions of the two countries.

India's role on the Security issue of Gulf Region

4162. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Information and Culture Minister of United Arab Emirates during his recent visit to India said that India should not distance itself from the security issue of the gulf region; and

(b) if so, in what manner India can play a strategic role in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Yes.

(b) The Gulf region is in India's neighbourhood. Its importance from the political, strategic and economic points of view cannot be over emphasised. India shares with the Gulf countries a common desire for peace, stability and security in the region. In persuance of this objective, India has continued the tradition of high-level visits to UAE and other Gulf countries for a regular review of regional and bilateral issues.

Death of an Indian Girl in Singapore

4163. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government are aware that an eight years old Indian girl Saachi has been killed in a water park in Singapore ;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Singapore High Commission has extended any help to the aggrieved family in the time of extreme grief; and

(d) if no help has been extended, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) On March 21, 2000, at about 2.15 PM Singapore time, two Indian girls Sukhna and Saachi were on a water ride called "Double Trouble" in the amusement park at Sentosa Island of Singapore. The two were riding on a rubber boat which overturned. Saachi got entangled inside the rubber matting and drowned. The exact cause leading to the drowning of Saachi is being investigated by the Singapore authorities.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. Indian High Commission in Singapore extended all necessary help to the relatives of Saachi including transportation of her body to India and follow up with the Singapore authorities with regard to investigation into the incident.

Understaffed Bangalore Passport Office

4164. SHRI K. C. KONDAIAH : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is fact that Bangalore Passport Office is understaffed;

(b) if so, the steps taken to provide the required number of staff; '

(c) whether there is any proposal to open more customer counters at said Passport Office; and